University of Michigan’s Zell Lurie Institute Launches Reverse Innovation Course to Bring New Mobility Solutions to Market

In partnership with Ford, SMART, NCIIA and the Alcoa Foundation, first-of-its-kind Ross School of Business course offers students action-based opportunity to drive innovation in the clean tech and new mobility arenas

Ann Arbor, Mich. – Jan. 14, 2014 – The University of Michigan’s Zell Lurie Institute is once again pioneering entrepreneurial education and action-based learning by offering a new course, Reverse Innovation, that will give students hands-on experience helping leading companies develop and bring new innovations to market. The course will take students through the process of reverse innovation – a backward flow of ideation from entrepreneurs and small businesses in China, India and other developing countries and emerging economies to large companies in the United States. Students this semester will get real-world experience going through the process by studying and applying scalable, energy-efficient mobility systems that have been deployed in countries around the world. The course is funded by the University’s Sustainable Mobility & Accessibility Research & Transformation (SMART) Program with the support of the Alcoa Foundation, as well as the Ford Motor Company and the National Collegiate Inventors and Innovators Alliance (NCIIA), a private organization that funds and trains faculty and student innovators to create successful, socially beneficial businesses.

The Zell Lurie Institute at the Ross School of Business is the first institution in the nation to integrate reverse innovation into its entrepreneurial coursework, with 18 multi-disciplinary teams participating, representing 40 scientists and engineers, as well as 25 MBAs. To gather data for the course, the Institute and SMART sent joint MBA-MS students from the University’s Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise and a student video team around the world to document mobility trends and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Gigabytes of data including interviews and video footage have been collected, with the goal of extracting salient socio-economic differences in how innovation in mobility is being addressed outside of the U.S. The findings and analysis will form the basis for the fall-term course project, which will engage SMART e(ntrepreneurship)-teams in the development of technology prototypes and entrepreneurial business models in the New Mobility area.

“This course is a perfect example of the collaborative, action-based learning that we find so important for our entrepreneurial students here at the University,” said Peter Adriaens, professor of entrepreneurship at the Ross School of Business. “It is designed to get students involved in thinking outside of what’s out there today, bringing a new level of innovation to the concept of transportation as we know it. By taking their budding ideas and vetting them, getting them funded and getting prototypes created, this type of hands-on course gives students the experience they need as they pursue business outside of the university setting.”

Realizing the growing movement away from traditional transportation trends, the course is largely motivated by public companies like Ford who are exploring how innovations that occur in the developing countries, in the absence of a legacy infrastructure, can help spur ideas for products in the U.S. Three of the concepts devised by students in this course, eV Score, ChargeMyCarNow and Bar2Bar Transportation, have also received funding through Dare to Dream Assessment and Mayleben Venture Shaping grants – the University’s program that moves students through the business creation process by offering business development seminars and awarding grants to individuals and student teams – thanks to SMART and the Alcoa Foundation. All student teams in the course are encouraged to apply for these types of grants, which will be awarded again in the spring.

“Our industry is about to go through a major transformation, driven by a confluence of market factors including new technologies and changing demographics,” said Erica Klampfl, future mobility manager, Ford research and innovation. “We’re exploring how advancements in mobility occur in developing countries and researching
whether such solutions could be leveraged here. We’re really looking forward to seeing what these talented students come up with.”

“The movement away from car ownership and towards more sustainable, multi-modal, IT enabled systems is already happening globally and parts of the U.S. are trying to catch up to the trend,” said Sue Zielinski, managing director of SMART. “Consider all of the apps that are being created for taxi hailing, ride sharing, fare payment, new service models, and more. Since 2006 SMART has been pioneering the advancement of the emerging New Mobility industry and entrepreneurial space (including launching its global Mobi Prize in 2012 with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation). When the Zell Lurie Institute brought the idea of a course to our attention, we knew it would be a great opportunity to work with the University’s bright MBA students to help solve mobility issues plaguing the transportation industry.”

About the Samuel Zell & Robert H. Lurie Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies
The Institute and its Center for Venture Capital and Private Equity Finance bring together a potent mix of knowledge, experience and opportunities from the front lines of entrepreneurship and alternative investments. The student learning experience is further enhanced through internships, entrepreneurial clubs and events that serve to provide viable networks and engage the business community. The School’s three student-led investment funds, with over $6.5M under management, immerse students in the business assessment and investment process. Founding Board Members include Samuel Zell, Chairman of Equity Group Investments and Eugene Applebaum, Founder of Arbor Drugs, Inc. For more information, visit the Institute at www.zli.bus.umich.edu.

About the Stephen M. Ross School of Business
The Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan is a vibrant and distinctive learning community grounded in the principle that business can be an extraordinary vehicle for positive change in today’s dynamic global economy. The Ross School of Business mission is to develop leaders who make a positive difference in the world. Through thought and action, members of the Ross community drive change and innovation that improves business and society.

Ross is consistently ranked among the world’s leading business schools. Academic degree programs include the MBA, Part-time MBA (Evening and Weekend formats), Executive MBA, Global MBA, Master of Accounting, Master of Supply Chain Management, Master of Entrepreneurship, Master of Management, BBA, and PhD. In addition, the school delivers open-enrollment and custom executive education programs targeting general management, leadership development, and strategic human resource management.

About SMART
SMART (Sustainable Mobility & Accessibility Research & Transformation) undertakes and catalyzes research, demonstration projects (living labs), education, and global learning exchange focused on advancing sustainable transportation innovation for an urbanizing world. Recognizing the complexity of the challenge and the sophistication of the innovation required, SMART takes a systems approach to urban mobility, or more broadly, accessibility. We work with local and international partners from diverse sectors and disciplines not only to understand and develop new theoretical perspectives, but more urgently to generate and accelerate implementation of practical, innovative, and sustainable solutions. Since 2006 SMART has been a pioneer in advancing the emerging New Mobility industry and entrepreneurial space.

SMART is a university-wide joint initiative of UMTRI, the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute and TCAUP, the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, in Ann Arbor.

# # #